



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **First time ever reduction of Spartina infestation in Willapa Bay anticipated**

OLYMPIA – The results won't be known until this spring, but the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) anticipates being able to report the *first ever reduction* of the Spartina infestation in Willapa Bay.

That's the primary message in WSDA's progress report on Spartina eradication sent to the state legislature last month.

More acres were treated in summer 2003 than during the previous six years combined according to Kyle Murphy, WSDA statewide Spartina control coordinator. Six thousand solid acres were treated.

State officials say eradication in the bay is a greater possibility than ever before. "We are very pleased with the progress we've made," Murphy stated.

Spartina is an aggressive noxious weed that displaces native vegetation, destroys shorebird and wildlife habitats, and severely threatens the state's shellfish industry.

The noxious weed was introduced into Washington waters in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the form of packing material for East Coast oysters being brought Willapa Bay. The weed gradually spread throughout the bay. Today the bay has the equivalent of 8,000 infested acres spread over 18,000 acres. More than 90 percent of Washington's Spartina infestation is located in Willapa Bay.

Murphy said reasons for eradication success in 2003 was the result of increased funding, improved tools, continued cooperation between all entities in the Spartina fight, increased public awareness of what will happen if eradication doesn't occur, and continued reliance on an *integrated pest management (IPM)* approach to eradication.

Murphy stated the involvement and cooperation between groups involved in the Spartina fight was unprecedented in 2003. He singled out the work of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Willapa Bay/Grays Harbor Oysters Growers Association, The Nature Conservancy, Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe, University of Washington Olympic Natural Resource Center, Washington State University Long Beach Research and Extension Unit, Pacific County Weed Board, and the Columbia Resource Alliance.

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Murphy said approximately \$3.2 million was spent treating Spartina infestations in Washington in 2003 -- approximately \$2.2 million from state funds and \$1 million from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Adequate funding is necessary to continue the fight against Spartina, Murphy said.

Murphy pointed out that Spartina infestations in Washington waters are found in four areas -- Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, north Puget Sound, and Hood Canal. He explained the Willapa Bay infestations are bigger and older, and therefore more difficult to eradicate.

The Spartina experience underscores the need to address invasive species sooner instead of later, Murphy stressed.

Persons with questions on the state's Spartina eradication program may view WSDA's 2003 annual report to the state legislature at WSDA's Web site at [www.agr.wa.gov](http://www.agr.wa.gov), then click respectively on "Plants and Insects" and "2003 Spartina Report to Legislature" under Hot Topics; or contact Murphy by phone at (360) 902-1923; by e-mail at [kmurphy@agr.wa.gov](mailto:kmurphy@agr.wa.gov); or by FAX at (360) 902-2094.

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